

立法會

Legislative Council

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by the Administration)

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Panel on Housing

Minutes of special meeting held on Wednesday, 1 September 1999, at 10:45 am in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Gary CHENG Kai-nam, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon HO Sai-chu, SBS, JP
Hon Edward HO Sing-tin, SBS, JP
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon NG Leung-sing
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHAN Yuen-han
Hon CHAN Kam-lam
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon SZETO Wah

Member attending : Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP

Members absent : Hon LEE Wing-tat (Chairman)
Hon Ronald ARCULLI, JP
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, SBS, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP

**Public officers
attending** : Housing Bureau

Ms Ophelia TSANG, Principal Assistant Secretary (2) (Acting)

Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau

Mr Gary YEUNG, Principal Assistant Secretary (Lands)

Works Bureau

Mr W S CHAN, JP, Deputy Secretary (Works Policy)

Civil Engineering Department

Mr Bernard LAM, JP, Director

Mr S H MAK, Assistant Director (Geo)/HKI

Mr H N WONG, Chief Geotechnical Engineer/Landslip Investigation

Housing Department

Mr Marco WU, JP, Director (Acting)

Mr Vincent TONG, Business Director (Management)

Lands Department

Mr I J MacNaughton, Assistant Director/Estate Management

Clerk in attendance : Ms LEUNG Siu-kum, Chief Assistant Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Miss Becky YU, Senior Assistant Secretary (1)3

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr CHENG Kai-nam took over the chair for the meeting.

I Maintenance of slopes near public housing estates
(LC Paper Nos. CB(1) 1837/98-99(01) to (03))

Slope maintenance responsibility

2. Members were disappointed that relevant government departments had denied responsibility for the slope near Shek Kip Mei Estate where landslide occurred on 25 August 1999. They asked if the Administration had identified the responsible department for repairs and maintenance of the slope after the incident. The Deputy Secretary for Works (Works Policy) (DSW(WP)) advised that the Lands Department (LD),

with the approval of the Finance Committee, had commissioned a consultancy study on Systematic Identification of Maintenance Responsibility of Slopes (SIMAR) in 1996 to determine the maintenance responsibilities for all registered slopes under the Slope Catalogue. The project would be completed by the end of 1999. As government departments were given the task to maintain slopes on government land alongside the maintenance of their facilities, LD was now notifying the concerned departments of the SIMAR results on their maintenance responsibility. Following recent discussions within the Administration, the Housing Department (HD) had recently agreed to take up, as Government's agent, the maintenance responsibility for about 400 slopes on unallocated government land adjoining public housing estates, including the one near Shek Kip Mei Estate, with funds provided by the Government. The Geotechnical Engineering Office (GEO) would continue to be responsible for any necessary upgrading works under the Landslip Preventive Measures (LPM) Programme.

3. Mr Fred LI expressed concern about the unclear demarcation of maintenance responsibility for government-owned slopes among different departments. He noted that under the existing Government arrangement, a department which needed to build certain facilities near a slope would be held responsible for maintaining the slope. Such an arrangement had deterred departments from providing necessary facilities. He asked which department had the overall decision-making power for the allocation of government-owned slopes for maintenance. Ms CHAN Yuen-han also expressed worries that the 400 slopes had been left unattended until HD recently agreed to take over the maintenance responsibility. DSW(WP) clarified that the Government was the owner of all slopes on government land. As the Government's land agent, LD had joined forces with other maintenance departments to take up the maintenance responsibility for those slopes not falling within the clear responsibility of any department. The Assistant Director/Estate Management (AD/EM) added that at present, the Slope Maintenance Section of LD was managing 14,000 government-owned slopes under this category. Mr LI expressed concern on whether LD had sufficient manpower to maintain such a large number of slopes, particularly when unlawful cultivation on hillsides by people like hikers was prevailing. AD/EM agreed that policing against unlawful cultivation was not an easy task as LD could not readily fence off the areas involved which were used by many people for walking and it was very difficult to arrange effective patrolling. To this end, LD had maintained close liaison with GEO to deal with the problem.

4. Messrs LEE Cheuk-yan and LEUNG Yiu-chung asked how the Administration could ensure the safety of residents living adjacent to slopes. In reply, the Director of Civil Engineering (DCE) acknowledged that slopes in Hong Kong were more vulnerable to landslides due to factors such as the heavy rainfall, topographical setting and soil conditions in Hong Kong. This underlined the need for an effective system to deal with the stability of slopes. GEO was established in 1977 to tackle the problem of existing slopes and to ensure the safety standards of newly formed slopes. The design and construction of slopes created after 1977 had to be checked by GEO to ensure compliance with the safety standards. For pre-1997 slopes, geotechnical studies were conducted to identify and prioritize these slopes for upgrading under the on-going LPM Programme. Priority was given to slopes that had a lower degree of stability and higher consequences in the event of failure. It was expected that by the year 2000, the overall landslide risk from old man-made slopes would have been reduced to 50% of that existed in 1977 by the actions taken under the current LPM Programme. The landslide risk would be further

reduced to 25% of the 1977 level upon completion of the expanded LPM Programme in 2010. However, the need for further LPM Programme after 2010 would have to be considered carefully as its cost-effectiveness would diminish as the number of sub-standard high consequence slopes decreased. DCE stressed that the Administration was committed to achieving the highest standards of slope safety. The existing level of slope safety in Hong Kong was comparable to that in the United States and Canada and higher than that in Japan and Korea.

5. DCE added that to facilitate the public's understanding on the conditions of a slope adjacent to their dwellings, a sign board showing the department responsible for its repair and maintenance had been erected on each registered government-owned slope. The Assistant Director (GEO)/HKI supplemented that GEO had set up a computerized Slope Information System on all the 54,000 registered man-made slopes under the Slope Catalogue. The public could have access to this information through the Internet or from the Building Management Resource Centres or from the Civil Engineering Library at Homantin. AD/EM informed members that LD was also developing a computerized system known as the Slope Maintenance Responsibility Information System through which the public would be able to know the responsible party for maintenance of each and every man-made slope registered in the New Catalogue. The system would be completed by the end of 1999.

6. Noting that there were still 6,500 high consequence slopes in Hong Kong, Ir Dr HO Chung-tai remarked that the pace of the expanded LPM Programme to upgrade 2,500 slopes over a period of ten years was not satisfactory. He also opined that the maintenance departments of high consequence slopes should be required to submit more frequent engineering reports, preferably in every five years instead of every five to ten years. In reply, DCE pointed out that many of the high consequence slopes would be demolished over the next ten years as a result of the intense development in Hong Kong. The overall landslide risk would be reduced by actions such as upgrading of old slopes through Government developments, road improvement projects and private developments, regular and enhanced maintenance of slopes as well as squatter clearance.

7. Mr Edward HO enquired about the actual cause of the slope failure near Shek Kip Mei Estate. He also queried the reliability of the result of the consultancy study on the slope conducted in August 1998 which concluded that no signs of instability was found. Mr NG Leung-sing asked if the failure was due to poor maintenance works. He remarked that according to a press report, an unknown department had carried out concrete spray work on the collapsed part of the slope in 1996. DCE replied that the exact cause of slope failure had yet to be determined subject to a detailed study to be completed by GEO in six months' time, but preliminary findings revealed that the failure was related to rising underground water level rather than maintenance work. The Director of Housing (Acting) (D of H (Ag)) added that the Administration was still tracing the details of the concrete spray works reported to have been carried out on the slope near Shek Kip Mei Estate in 1996. Mr NG was not convinced that it should take such a long time to trace the record. He considered that there was a need for the Administration to improve the logging system on maintenance works of slopes. At members' request, D of H (Ag) undertook to provide the report of the consultancy study conducted in 1998 on the slope near Shek Kip Mei Estate.

(*Post-meeting note:* The report was circulated vide LC Paper No. CB(1) 1906/98-99 on 15 September 1999.)

8. Mr James TO opined that the Administration should review the design of the slope near Shek Kip Mei Estate if the landslide was not related to maintenance work. DCE advised that the slope was created some 40 years ago. Its design did not take into account the effect of underground water assessed from field monitoring data since it was beyond the knowledge at that time. Current engineering practice would require the design of the slope to cater for rainstorms of return period of 10 years. As to whether the Administration would review the safety standards of all existing slopes in the light of the landslip near Shek Kip Mei Estate, DCE replied that GEO had conducted independent detailed studies on all landslide incidents to determine the causes of failure and lessons to be learned. International geotechnical experts were also invited to advise on the ways to improve the slope safety system. Ir Dr HO asked if the Administration would install alarm devices on high consequence slopes to reduce landslide damages. DCE considered the proposal not feasible as the devices referred to were not available for the time being owing to technological constraints. On the suggestion of installing devices on slopes to detect the rise in underground water level, DCE pointed out that it might not be useful as rising underground level was only one factor contributing to landslide. Nevertheless, GEO had been operating an automatic raingauge network in cooperation with the Hong Kong Observatory to provide data for the announcement of Landslip Warning.

9. Mr TO expressed worries that some slopes on unallocated government land with the same design as the slope near Shek Kip Mei Estate were being left unattended. In response, DCE reiterated that departments had been given the task to maintain some 37,000 government-owned slopes alongside the maintenance of their facilities. For example, Highways Department maintained road-side slopes; Water Supplies Department maintained slopes affecting their reservoirs and catchwaters; HD maintained slopes affecting their estates; and Architectural Services Department maintained slopes affecting government schools. For slopes with no facilities around, LD would take up the maintenance responsibility.

10. Referring to the 1998 Slope Maintenance Audit Report on Housing Department, Ir Dr HO noted with concern that 40% of the 1,562 slopes under the management of HD were found to be in poor maintenance conditions. The Business Director/Management (BD/M) clarified that these slopes were graded as poorly maintained mainly because most their surface channels were blocked by rubbish and withered/overgrown vegetation. Such deficiencies however did not mean that the slopes were unsafe. Besides, improvement works had already been carried out to rectify the problem. BD/M assured members that HD would review its existing slope maintenance system in the light of the recommendations in the audit report. Efforts such as increasing the frequency of regular inspections by management staff would be made to improve the maintenance system. DCE shared BD/M's view. He said that the objectives of the Slope Maintenance Audit were to assess the extent to which HD had discharged their slope maintenance responsibilities and to assist them in improving their performance. It had no bearing on the safety of the slopes. Ir Dr HO questioned the difference between the number of slopes managed by HD in the audit report and that in the information paper provided by the Administration. BD/M advised that the discrepancy was due to the inclusion of slopes adjacent to Home Ownership Scheme courts in the audit report.

11. As regards the 400 slopes which had been recently put under the management of HD, DCE estimated that 30% of these slopes would not require further upgrading since they were created after 1977 and the design and construction of which had been checked by GEO. However, about half of the remaining 70% slopes would be eligible for inclusion into the expanded LPM Programme with priority to be determined. BD/M supplemented that HD had engaged consultants to begin initial inspection and survey on the condition of the slopes. In the event that the slopes were found to be substandard, they would either be improved by HD or referred to GEO for inclusion in the LPM Programme for necessary upgrading work. On the difference between maintenance and upgrading of slopes, DCE advised that the former referred to routine inspection and repairs as well as regular reports by geotechnical engineers whereas the latter referred to improving stability of slopes to the current safety standards. Relevant departments had been informed of the schedule for the upgrading works under the LPM Programme.

12. Mr TO considered that the Administration should disclose the locations and conditions of the 400 slopes. D of H (Ag) advised that the conditions of these slopes had yet to be determined subject to the survey conducted by the consultant. He nevertheless undertook to provide a list showing the locations of these slopes.

(Post-meeting note: The required information was circulated vide LC Paper Nos. CB(1) 1888 and 1895/98-99.)

13. Referring to the Tenants Purchase Scheme (TPS), Mr SEZTO Wah enquired about the responsibility of owners in the maintenance of slopes near TPS estates. D of H (Ag) reiterated that HD was responsible to maintain slopes within the boundaries of public housing estates. Therefore, when these estates were put up for sale under TPS, the boundaries of land lease would generally follow those of the vesting order of the estate concerned. The owners concerned would share the responsibility for the maintenance of the slopes inside the estates' boundaries. For slopes outside the boundaries of TPS estates, HD would maintain these slopes as Government's agent with funds provided by the Government. A lease plan would be drawn up to delineate between areas that would be the responsibility of TPS purchasers and that of HD. He added that the cost of repairs for slopes should not be a particular problem since all slopes within public housing were subject to regular maintenance. Besides, the one-off contribution of \$14,000 made by the Housing Authority (HA) for each TPS flat sold, coupled with the monthly contributions made through the maintenance fees to the Maintenance Fund would help to meet the cost of major maintenance repairs.

14. Ms CHAN was not convinced of the Administration's response given that many TPS Phase 2 purchasers had complained that HA had included slopes outside the boundaries of TPS estates into the Deeds of Mutual Covenant. The Principal Assistant Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands/Lands advised that unlike new public housing estates, land for older estates was transferred to HA with no clear indication of responsibility for slope maintenance. Land documents for housing estates now included information on the slope maintenance responsibility. With the introduction of SIMAR in 1996, the Administration was able to identify more clearly the maintenance responsibility for man-made slopes. Ms CHAN asked if there was a channel through which departments could appeal against the decision on the allocation of slopes.

DSW(WP) confirmed the disputes arising from demarcation of slope maintenance among different departments could be resolved through meetings chaired by the Works Bureau. Ms CHAN opined that as the policy bureau for land management, the Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau should review the existing practice on the allocation of slope maintenance responsibility among departments.

Re-housing arrangements for tenants affected by the landslide at Shek Kip Mei Estate

15. Ms CHAN was perturbed that an elderly tenant had taken his own life because he was not able to have the reception flat of his preferred choice. She pointed out that some elderly tenants might have been upset by the sudden resettlement and were unwilling to move out the estate where they had lived for years. HD should learn from the lesson and reach out to the elderly tenants to ascertain their needs in order to avoid similar recurrences. D of H (Ag) said that all personnel working on the re-housing of affected tenants were equally sad about the incident. He said that although there was a need to set priorities for residents to select their reception flats, staff of HD would try their best to meet the individual re-housing needs of elderly tenants as far as practicable. Regretfully, the tenant concerned had never expressed his dissatisfaction with the flat offered to him.

16. Mr CHAN Kam-lam expressed concern about TPS owners affected by slopes. He asked what re-housing arrangements would be made available to these owners in the event of slope failure. D of H (Ag) advised that under the existing housing policy, persons in private premises who were involved in fires or natural disaster and in need of accommodation would be arranged to stay in temporary shelters or transit centres. Their eligibility for re-housing to public housing flats would have to be investigated by staff of HD. The same arrangement would apply to TPS owners.

II Any other business

17. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:50 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

16 November 1999